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Ethical Sensitivity and Global Competence among University Students

Abstract

Globalization and technology are rapidly changing the world we live in. Preparing students for their role as citizens of the world is an important task in higher education, given the challenges in the focus of global society. Thus, the main objective of this research was to examine the possible relationship between ethical sensitivity and global competence among university students. The Ethical Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire, Global Citizenship Scale and a personal information sheet were administered to a sample of 248 (136 female, 112 male) students. The results indicated that there was a positive relationship between the levels of ethical sensitivity and global competence among students. At the same time there was a significant positive relationship between ethical sensitivity, global competence, gender and academic performance. From the findings of this research, we can conclude that students have high ethical sensitivity and global competence skills, therefore moral development and global competence must become a part of the core mission of global education.

Keywords: ethical sensitivity, global competence, students, global education, citizenship

Introduction

Twenty-first century students live in an interconnected, diverse and rapidly changing world (OECD, 2016). Emerging economic, digital, cultural, demographic and environmental forces are shaping young people's lives around the planet and increasing their intercultural encounters on a daily basis (Buckingham, 2007). Today young people are expected not only learn to participate in a more interconnected world, but also to appreciate and benefit from cultural differences. Developing a global and intercultural outlook is a process – a lifelong process – that educators can shape (UNESCO, 2016).

Nations and higher education institutions are becoming increasingly interdependent through rapid technological innovations and growing transnational collaboration. Frequent calls have been made for institutions to equip students with the necessary skills to become interethnic, intercultural and globally competent citizens (Burstein, 2007). As asserted by Dewey & Duff (2009), "Our global era enquires globally competent citizens".

Preparing students for their role as citizens of the world is an important task in higher education, given the challenges global society faces (Gibson et al., 2008; Chong, 2015). Toumi, Jabot & Lundgren (2008) suggest that global citizenship education should include education on human rights, peace and media, intercultural dialogue, intercultural relations, international relations, and cosmopolitan citizenship.

Education is a basic human right and students need to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and competence skills to succeed in a global world and to be a part of any higher education institution. Furthermore, when it comes to higher education, more attention should be essentially paid to the moral and civic area by examining the ethical sensitivity (an aspect of moral development) of students and by investigating how education can help prepare these students for their role of engaged global citizens.

Ethical sensitivity

Morality can be defined as the active process of constructing meaning and understanding related to social interaction (McFadden, 1998). Moral values refer to opinions on an idea of what is good and bad. According to Strain (2005), morality is built upon for basic constituent processes: moral sensitivity (being aware of a moral problem, if it exists); moral motivation (giving moral values higher priority than personal values); moral judgment (determine which action is the best from a moral standpoint); and moral character (how a person acts when confronted with a moral dilemma). It is considered that of these four moral components, ethical sensitivity is the most important component since it is a condition for the other three (Tirri, 2003).

Ethical sensitivity is a fundamental element of a human moral conduct. Ethical sensitivity was coined for the first time by Rest (1983) and it is the first important component of his four component moral theory. An ethnically sensitive person recognizes moral aspects – involving questions of right and worry of a situation, and is able to identify with the role of another person. Tirri & Nokelainen (2011) indicated that “to respond to a situation in a moral way, a person must be able to perceive and interpret events in a way that leads to ethical action”.

The ethical sensitivity of university students is one of the most important predictors of a future professional ethical position. In fact, ethical sensitivity of students is one of the essential requirements so that they can realize ethical problems and perceive events in a way that leads to ethical action (Dellaportas & Cooper, 2011). Also students would be able to think critically about social situations and analyze issues related to real life, in addition to identifying possible solutions creatively and innovatively. If they do not realize ethical problems, they cannot behave ethically.

Global competence

Today, it is necessary to raise citizens who feel responsible towards the entire humanity, who possess a universal awareness. In the literature, any citizen having these characteristics is called “a global citizen” (Nodding, 2004). Global citizenship has been defined as “the sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanities”. It emphasizes political, economic, social and cultural interdependence and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global (UNESCO, 2015). Due to the attention the concept of global citizenship has been receiving in recent years, many international organizations have developed educational materials to ensure that children and adolescents are educated according to this concept.

Hence, developing globally competent students goes beyond the capacity to think critically and creatively about the world (Rexeisen & Al-Khakis, 2009). They

recognize their own limitations and abilities. Globally competent students demonstrate an array of intercultural communication skills and display interest and knowledge about the world and events (Deardoff, 2006).

According to these findings, global competence is a multidimensional capacity. It recognizes numerous skills, including reasoning with information, communication, skills in intercultural contexts, perspective taking, conflict resolution skills, and adaptability. Global competence should not be observed as a sorted set of independent skills, but rather as an involving capacity model that reflects an integrated understanding of an outlook for global affairs (Bucker & Pouts, 2010).

The examination of best practices in the field of ethics and global competence among public high schools allows educators in other schools to adopt, modify and integrate ethical sensitivity and global competency skills into the general high school curricula, and create more equitable learning opportunities for all students (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). Understanding how ethical sensitivity and global competence skills have been integrated into everyday learning will empower other schools and school leaders to imagine how they should begin to offer higher quality learning in this field. So the main purpose of this study was to examine the possible relationship between ethical sensitivity and the global competence level among university students.

Methods

Participants

The sample of students was randomly selected and all of them participated voluntarily. The participants included 248 university students aged between 21 – 23 years. The mean calculated age of the students was 21.85 (SD=8.12). Of all participants, 136 were female (54.86%), and 112 were male (45.16%). The study group of the research included third year students who studied psychology and medical sciences at the University in Tetovo. The success was calculated by the average successes the last year.

Data collection tools

Ethical Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire (ESSQ)

The Ethical Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire (ESSQ) developed by Tirri & Nokelainen (2007) was used in order to measure the ethical sensitivity level. The ESSQ measures the following seven dimensions of ethical sensitivity: reading and expressing emotions, taking the perspectives of others, caring by connecting to others, working with interpersonal and group differences, preventing social bias, generating interpretations and options, and identifying the consequences of actions and options. The instrument consisted of 28 items. It is a five-point Likert scale. The total score is within the range from 28 to 140, with higher scores indicating greater ethical sensitivity. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency was 0.832.

Global Citizenship Scale (GCS)

The Global Citizenship Scale developed by Morals & Ogden (2011) was used in order to measure global citizenship attitudes. The scale consists of 30 items and

three dimensions: social responsibility (including social justice), global competence (including self-awareness, global knowledge and intercultural communication), and global civic engagement (including involvement in civic organizations and global civic activism). The items of the scale are measured on a five-point Likert scale. In the present study, the scale's Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistence was 0.792.

Data procedure and data analysis

Data collection tools were administered by the researchers during the winter semester of the academic year 2018 – 2019. Each respondent was personally invited to complete a paper and a pencil version of the questionnaires. The period for answering the scale lasted 60 minutes.

Statistical analysis of the results obtained in the research was conducted with SPSS 20.0 for Windows package program. The results were analyzed by applying Kruskal-Wallis H-test, Mann Whitney U-test and Spearman correlation coefficient.

Results

In our study we observed that the mean rate of ethical sensitivity was 128.38 (SD=16.24), while the mean rate of global citizenship was 238.88 (SD=16.21). The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed that there was a positive relationship between the level of ethical sensitivity and global citizenship ($H=7.237$, $p<.05$). At the same time, the students' skills had the highest rating in taking the perspectives of others ($M=23.14$, $SD=9.12$), caring by connecting to others ($M=24.12$, $SD=9.16$) and global competence ($M=64.20$, $SD=6.19$). The skills they rated at the lowest level included reading and expressing emotions ($M=14.34$, $SD=6.22$), identifying the consequences of actions and options ($M=12.14$, $SD=5.28$), and global civic engagement ($M=54.32$, $SD=5.18$).

The results indicated that there were significant differences between the scores on ethical sensitivity between male and female students. Female students were more likely to read and express emotions ($M=23.18$, $SD=8.34$) than their male peers ($M=18.14$, $SD=6.21$), $z(1, n=248) = -3.921$, $p=.001$. On the other hand male students were more likely to take the perspectives of others ($M=16.20$, $SD=7.65$) than female students ($M=14.22$, $SD=5.31$), $z(1, n=248) = -3.823$, $p=.001$. The difference between female and male respondents was smallest in the dimensions five (Preventing social bias) and seven (Identifying the consequences of actions and options). Moreover, the girls had higher mean scores in the two of three sub-dimensions of global competence, namely self-awareness and global knowledge ($z=-5.342$, $p=.001$ and $z=-4.325$, $p=.002$), while the boys had higher mean scores in one of the three sub-dimensions of global civic engagement, namely involvement in civic activism ($z=-5.723$, $p=.001$). No significant gender differences were found in regard to the three sub-dimensions of social responsibility.

With the statistical analysis of the data, we obtained a presence of a high correlation coefficient between ethical sensitivity and global competence, and an average score during the studies. The results of the Spearman correlation indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between ethical sensitivity and the average score level ($r_s = .296$, $p<.008$). The results also showed that the global competence positively predicted academic performance ($r_s = 0.329$, $p<.001$).

Discussion

The results of this study showed that there was a strong correlation between ethical sensitivity levels of adolescents from 21 to 23 years of age, enrolled in the higher education process and one of three dimensions of global citizenship, that is, global competence. The obtained results are similar to the results obtained by other researchers (Narvaez, 2001; Beguilers, 2011). Students should be challenged to recognize and evaluate own values, beliefs and behavior to explore worldwide horizons. This entails recognizing values behind statements, ideas, and perspectives, and evaluating how they relate to students' personal values and knowledge. According to Colby et al. (2003), a person who has less ethical sensitivity is more prone to ignore the existence of ethical issues compared to a person who has more ethical sensitivity.

From the research it can be noted that the achievement of success in learning is influenced by ethical sensitivity. Students with high scores of self-estimated ethical sensitivity had better results in learning. Tirri (2003) found that the privileged position of the maturation of moral thinking still seems to exist at the age of around 20 years. Also girls are more care-oriented and they express emotional feelings to a greater extent than boys. The findings are partially consistent with the literature (Rut, 2009), which suggests that girls are more focused towards their moral orientation and boys are more justice-oriented. This tendency can also be explained by the nature of items measuring ethical sensitivity skills. The majority of them measure care ethics with emotional and social intelligence.

Furthermore, the results indicated that the female generally had a higher level of global competence score than male students. In fact, the girls should be more humility, sensitivity, adaptable, flexible and open-minded to living to other cultures. On the other side, the boys contribute to volunteer work or assistance in global civic organizations. At the same time, the results in our study showed that high-ability students had higher global competence skills. They possessed skills to understand cultural norms of the others, to create a better world that is based on considering and respecting others, to promote responsibility, to collaborate with members of the society or to develop new cognitive skills, which help them to think systematically and creatively (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Globally competent students recognized their own limitations and abilities for engaging in intercultural encounters. They display interest and knowledge about world issues and events.

Conclusion

Globalization and technology are rapidly changing the world we live in. The present globalized era entail students who are equipped with interethnic, intercultural and international understanding, and who are enterable as responsible, knowledgeable and informed global citizens (Bartell, 2003). Therefore, higher education institutions have increasingly emphasized internationalization as a core element of their strategic goals for the next century. Also, educational and instructional leaders need to reexamine teaching strategies and curricula, so that all students can thrive in a globally interdependent society.

The present study summarizes that there is a significant positive relationship between ethical sensitivity, global competence, gender and academic performance

among university students. From these findings it can be concluded that moral development and global competence need to be a part of global education.

Practical implications and further research

For the educational purpose, the findings in this paper suggest that including ethical issues and being attentive to moral development in programs for students might also cause their interest and need attention. The results of this study suggest an advanced ethical sensitivity of this group which might be an additional reason to dedicate attention to ethical and moral issues in programs for students. Simultaneously, global competence needs to be assimilated into everyday teaching and learning. Maybe global citizenship courses can support students in their moral development and provide them an opportunity to be educated in order to develop the required knowledge and skills to succeed in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent global society.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to all participants who took part in this study.

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